

Poliovirus in an Amish Community in Minnesota: What Does it Mean for Missouri?

Poliovirus has been found in five individuals from three different households in an Amish community in Minnesota. Health officials in Missouri have been investigating to find out if there has been exposure to communities in this state:

- To prevent any cases of polio disease,
- To see if the virus is spreading to Missouri,
- To try to determine where the poliovirus came from, and
- To determine whether poliovirus is occurring in other communities or persons outside the Amish community.

What is polio?

Polio is a disease caused by a virus that lives in the throat and intestinal tract.

What are the symptoms of polio?

Most people don't have symptoms. However, some people with polio develop paralysis (which means they can't move arms or legs). This occurs in about 1 out of every 200 people. Some people may die if polio paralyzes the muscles that help them breathe.

How is poliovirus spread?

The poliovirus is found in the stool and throat. It is spread through contact with the stool of an infected person (for instance, by changing diapers or not washing hands after having a stool). The period between exposure to the virus and onset of illness is usually 1 – 3 weeks.

Is this situation unusual?

Polio used to be very common in the U.S. before polio vaccination began in 1955. Polio is no longer occurring in the U.S.

What is known about this poliovirus?

The virus found in this situation is the virus used in oral polio vaccine. This is very unusual because the vaccine containing this virus has not been used in the United States for five years. This polio strain originally came from a person who received oral polio vaccine outside the U.S.

Why is this a concern?

The poliovirus found in the Amish children in Minnesota has changed so that it is more likely to be spread person to person and cause polio disease, possibly even paralysis. The more the virus is spreading in the community, the more likely someone will develop polio disease.

Where did the poliovirus come from?

It is not known how or when this virus first came to this Amish community. Health officials have been conducting investigations in this community and the hospitals that provided care to the infant.

Investigations have focused on travel and social events that may contribute to spread. Questions have been asked about symptoms that may be similar to polio to detect unidentified disease.

What have health officials done to prevent polio?

Polio vaccine is being offered to all members of this and other Amish and Mennonite communities in Missouri. This vaccine is a shot containing the “killed” virus. All other unvaccinated persons are encouraged to be vaccinated. Unless all unvaccinated persons with ties to this community are vaccinated, cases of polio from this virus are likely to occur in the future.

Is polio vaccine safe?

The vaccine now used to protect against polio does not contain live poliovirus. It has been found to have very few side effects. The most common side effect is soreness in the place where the shot was given.

Who can I ask if I have more questions?

If you have questions about polio or polio vaccine, please contact your regular healthcare provider, your local health department or the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Immunization Assessment and Assurance at (866) 628-9891.



Missouri Department of Health and
Senior Services
P.O. Box 570
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102